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Monday, 6 March 2017

Yangon Chief Minister undergoes successful heart surgery

On 5 March, Yangon Region's Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein underwent heart surgery at the Yankin Children's Hospital. The operation began at 7am and was successfully completed by about 1pm, with the Chief Minister reported to be in good condition. It is also marked as a successful milestone of the myanmar doctors in heart surgery.

U Phyo Min Thein was diagnosed with congenital stenosis of the heart valve and an enlarged aorta. His surgery was performed by veteran Myanmar doctors.

The success for the operation can be credited to the systematic pre-planning by various members including Union Minister for Health and Sports leadership and guidance, the Permanent Secretary, Director General for Health Department, the Head of Yangon Region Health Department, and the various committees formed under the Yankin Children's Hospital's Chief Medical Officer.

The team of doctors include Dr. Myint Myint Khine (Chief Medical Officer, Yankin Children's Hospital), Prof. Aung Ye Oo (Cardiothoracic Surgeon, UK), Prof. Win Win Kyaw (Cardiothoracic Surgeon), Prof. Aung Thu (Cardiothoracic Surgeon), Prof. Aung Kyi (Anesthetist), Prof. Aye Aye Aye (Cardiac Anesthetist), Prof. Thida Aung (National Blood Bank), Prof. Zaw Than Htun (Chief Physician),

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UNEXPECTED JELLYFISH IN MYANMAR WATERS A BOON FOR FISHERMEN



Fishermen catching unprecedentedly jellyfish in the Andaman Sea off the Taninthayi coast on 5th March. PHOTO: KYAW SOE (KAWTHOUNG IPRD)



A woman stores jellyfish in a hand-made tank before sending them to the market. PHOTO: KYAW SOE (KAWTHOUNG IPRD)

Kyaw Soe (Kawthoung IPRD)

THE unprecedentedly rich appearance of jellyfish in local waters has resulted in extra money in the pockets of fishermen in Kawthoung township.

Local fishermen have been catching the abundance of jellyfishes out of the water near the Parchan bay in the Andaman Sea near Kawthoung Township since early March.

According to local fishermen, jellyfish appearing in the sea in Myanmar water is unusual and happens only once or twice a year.

Their mass appearance may be due to the change of marine current direction. Jelly fishes are floating on the sea surface on sun-

ny days and disappear in cloudy weather.

With the recent sunny weather and favourable water currents, local fishermen have been hauling up floating jellyfish into their boats and increasing their daily income by selling the jellyfish to licensed seafood buying centres. The cleaned and processed jellyfish are then exported to the America and European market through Thailand market. One wet jellyfish is traded at the price 4 to 5 Thai baht (Ks 2000), in the market. Three fishermen in a boat can catch more than 600 to 800 jellyfish a day, which can fetch more than one lakh per day.

Thriving populations of endangered mammals offer conservationists hope in Myanmar

THE forests of Karen state are a conservationist's dream.

Ranging from teak trees to bamboo, they contain some of the most iconic species of endangered mammals in the world.

"This includes things like tigers, leopards, elephants, bears — all of these species of huge global significance," said Clare Campbell, executive director of Karen Wildlife Conservation Ini-

tiative (KWCI).

"I think it's probably one of the most significant [conservation] areas certainly in Asia, if not in the world." The Perth-based group has coordinated the

first major survey of the area using remote sensor cameras.

The images of big cats, some with cubs, has thrilled conservationists.

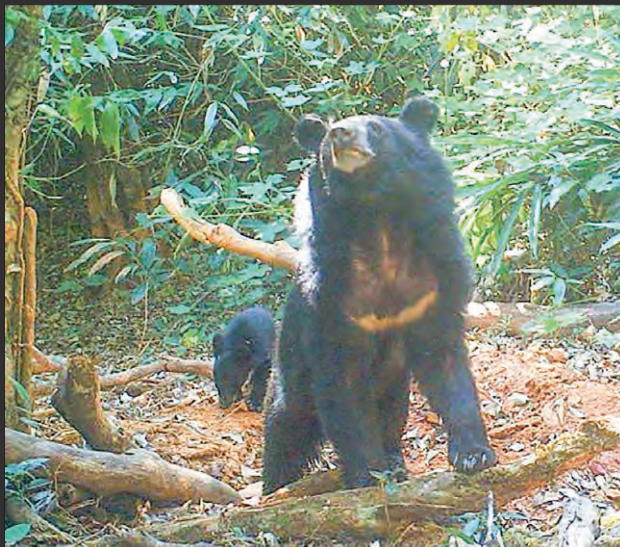
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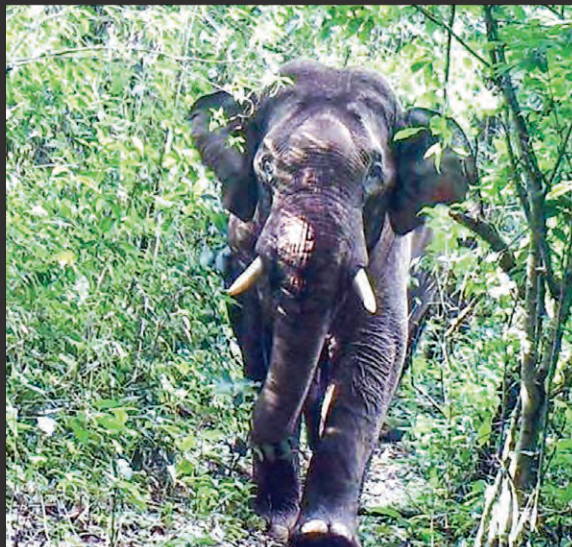
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Thriving populations of endangered mammals offer conservationists hope in Myanmar

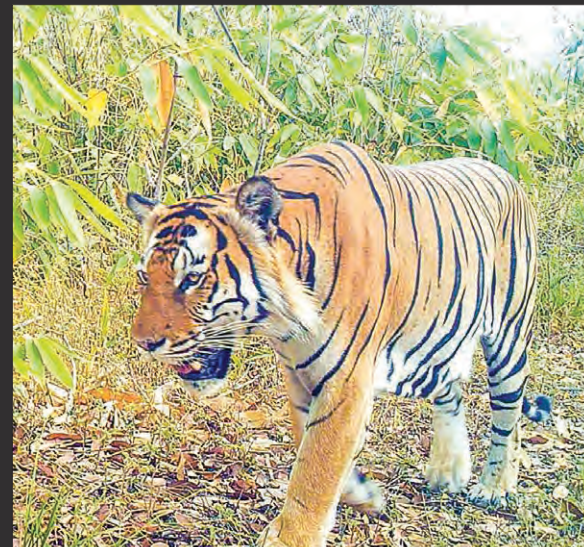
PHOTO: SUPPLIED KAREN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE



The Asian black bear, also known as a moon bear, is much smaller than its American counterpart.



Elephants hold a near-mystical place in Myanmar's culture.



Tigers are among the most endangered animals on the planet.

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"With leopards it's particularly significant because we know there's a breeding population — there's a solid population of healthy leopards in here and a full prey base to support them," Ms Campbell says.

A scientific paper about the survey, published this month, said Kayin state, in Myanmar, held "one of the most significant leopard populations remaining in South-East Asia".

For tigers, the forest's location on the border with Thailand is crucial.

"The Thai population of tigers in the western forest complex was probably the last significant population of tigers in this whole region ... but these two populations are moving between the two regions," says Ms Campbell.

The survey area is controlled by the Karen National Union, an ethnic group that has fought the government for decades over autonomy, but signed a ceasefire in 2015.

Fighting has meant the region has been largely off-limits to researchers, until now.

With funding and ground support from a range of organisations, the group was able to record 10,000 days and nights of animal appearances.

Images of poachers cause for concern

But there were worrying glimpses of men with guns.

"Sadly the reality is there is hunting starting to increase in some of these areas for the illegal wildlife trade ... which is just further reason why we need to increase the direct protection on the ground," Ms Campbell says.

Direct protection means rangers.

Already six 10-man teams patrol the forests, but that's not enough.

"Urgent action is thus needed to assist the Karen people to protect one of South-East Asia's last intact rich and diverse ecosystems," write co-authors Saw Sha Bwe Moo, Graden Froese and Thomas Gray in the *Oryx* Journal.

One thing going for the Karen forests is the attitude of the local population, with cultural taboos forbidding the hunting of key species, like the great hornbill and tigers.

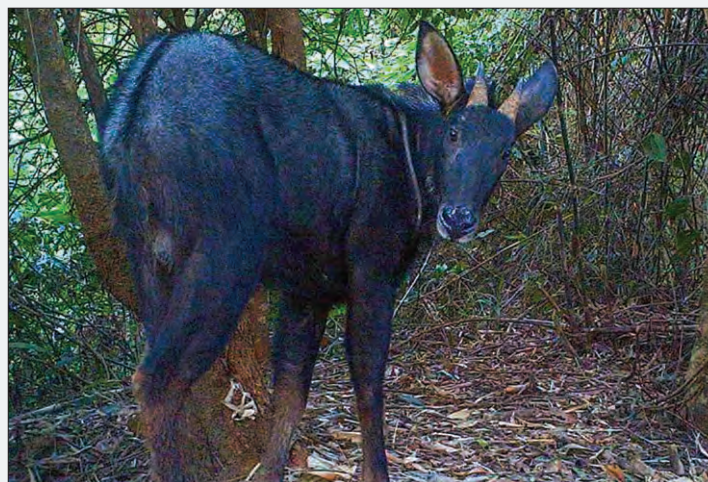
"The tigers kind of represent the spirit of the forest ... and the hornbill are like Karen couples in their past life," says Paul Sein Twa, director of the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network.

In so many places that "spirit" animal has gone.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED KAREN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE



Photo images of poachers have triggered calls for better protection for the animals.



The serow is a species of goat-antelope.

"Urgent action is thus needed to assist the Karen people to protect one of South-East Asia's last intact rich and diverse ecosystems"

Ms Campbell says hunting and logging in some parts of Asia has left what's known as "empty forest syndrome", where you can stand amongst trees but hear no birdcalls. It is a sure sign the ecosystems needed to support animals have been stripped out.

But the Karen forests, isolated by decades of civil war, offer a chance of redemption.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," Ms Campbell says. "We have nature in balance in this area and you don't find that in many other places across the world."

"So we've got one opportunity to not repeat the mistakes made in other regions." —*South-east Asia correspondent Liam Cochrane*

Traffic accidents and fatalities decreasing in Myanmar

ONLY 25 traffic accidents were reported nationwide in February 2017, it is learnt from the Highway Police Force. The number of deaths and injuries on the country's roads is expected to continue to decrease due to the government's attempts to systematically curb traffic accidents along the Yangon-Mandalay Expressway.

To reduce road accidents, the Ministry of Construction repaired sections of the road along the expressway and the Highway Police Force has disseminated knowledge on traffic rules to the people to ensure the safe and smooth flow

of traffic and passengers. Traffic control procedures have been instituted that include tougher action against reckless drivers and use of over-speed warning devices. Moreover, educative talks about the Highways Law were given to the residents along the expressway and the Highway Police Force made surprise checks at tollgates to see whether passenger buses abide by the traffic rules.

Four people, including one woman, were killed and 37 others injured in 25 road accidents occurred in February, it is learnt.—*Than Oo (Lemyethna)*

Yepu and Mayanchaung checkpoints reopened to stem flow of illegal goods

Yepu and Mayanchaung permanent checkpoints were reopened in Shan and Mon States to be able to prevent flow of illegal goods to the neighbouring countries starting on 1 March.

The 655 vehicles carrying exports and 701 vehicles with imports on Mandalay-Lashio Union Highway and 142 vehicles with exports and 267 vehicles with imports aboard on Yangon-Myawady Highway were checked systematically by the combined squads on 4 March.

Illegal goods estimated to be worth Ks33 million were seized at Yepu checkpoint on 4 March while prohibited goods worth Ks15.045 million were also confiscated at Mayanchaung checkpoint on the same day.

The combined team searched a passenger bus en route from Myawady, a border town in Kayin State to Yangon, Myanmar's commercial city, and found undocumented computers and related items worth Ks14.805 million on board.

AN OLD MayangChaung checkpoint which has been closed for five years was reopened in Kyaikto township, Mon State on 1 March, according to the Mawlamyine Customs Department.

The old checkpoint was reopened because there have been many instances of illegal trading in unhealthy food, lower quality goods, illegal goods, arms and ammunition after the checkpoint was closed.—*Myanmar News Agency*



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing being welcomed by Lt-Gen Vu Chien Thang, Director of the Foreign Relations Department of Vietnam Defence Services. Photo: MNA

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visits Vietnam

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF of the Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing left Nay Pyi Taw International Airport for Vietnam at the invitation of the Defence Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Mr. Ngo Xuan Lichat at 1pm yesterday.

The delegation led by the Senior General was seen off at the airport by Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services Vice Senior General Soe Win and wife, the Senior Military officers from the Office

of the Commander-in-Chief, the Commander of Nay Pyi Taw Command, the Vietnamese Ambassador to Myanmar Mrs. Luan Thuy Duong, the Cambodian Ambassador to Myanmar Mr. Sok Chea and officials.

The Senior General was welcomed at the Noi Bai international airport in Hanoi by the Director of the Foreign Relations Department of Vietnam Defence Services Lt. General Vu Chien Thang and officers, Myanmar Military Attaché U Kyaw Soe Win, and officials.

The Senior General and party arrived at the Embassy of Myanmar in Hanoi at 7pm yesterday and met with family members of the embassy and military attaché's office and invited Myanmar citizens living in Vietnam.

The Senior General and wife gave gifts from the Tadmaw Textile and Clothing Factory to staff of the embassy and military attaché's office.

After that the staff families of the embassy hosted a dinner for the Senior General and party.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Appointment of Ambassador agreed

THE Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has accorded Agreement to the proposed appointment of Dr. Khalid Hussain Memon as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Dr. Khalid Hussain Memon was born in 1964. He holds degrees of MBBS, B.A and LLB. He joined Foreign Service of Pakistan in 1988. He served at the Headquarters as Section Officer in OIC and Africa Directorates, Director in Finance and Afghanistan Division and Director-General in Finance Division and Headquarters. He was assigned in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Missions in Oslo (2007-2009) and Cairo (2010-2011). He is currently serving as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Republic of Poland since December 2013. He is married.—*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

Yangon Chief Minister undergoes successful heart surgery

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Prof. Kyaw Zin Wai (Pediatrician), Associate Professor Khin Yin Yin Htwe (Cardiac Anesthetist), Associate Professor Than Oo (Radiologist), Dr. Lei Lei Htun (General Practitioner), Dr. Nyi Nyi (Cardiac Anesthetist), Dr. Nyan Lin Aung (Perfusionist, Cardiac Anesthetist), Dr. Aung Thein Htut (Physician Assistant, Child Cardiology), and Dr. Than Htike Aung (Cardiac Chief Physician), all working in close proximity.

The heart surgery team was led by Prof. Aung Ye Oo with collaboration from Prof. Win Win Kyaw and Prof. Aung Thu.

Prof. Aung Ye Oo graduated from the Yangon University of Medicine (1) in 1988 and beginning in 2014 held the position of Chief of Surgery and Professor at the Liverpool Heart and Chest

Hospital in Liverpool, England. He also serves as chairman for the UK Aortic Forum and starting in 2013 has made annual visits to Myanmar and the Yankin Children's Hospital seven times and has performed surgeries for over 90 patients.

During the surgery for the Yangon Chief Minister, the anesthetic team was led by Prof. Aye Aye Aye with collaboration from Associate Professor Khin Yin Yin Htwe, Dr. Nyan Lin Aung and the nursing team led by Head Nurse Daw Htwe Khin.

The Ministry for Health and Sports announced that the successful heart surgery performed on Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein by medical staff from Myanmar marks an extraordinary milestone for medicine in Myanmar.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Development and conservation of colonial-era buildings in Yangon discussed

THE Director of the Yangon Heritage Trust, U Moe Moe Lwin, has said conservation for a sustainable city relies upon a well thought-out plan as there is an urgent need to conserve historical buildings in Yangon with the noticeable increase in high-rise buildings since

the beginning of economic reforms in 2011 move the city towards a more sustainable infrastructure.

"The point is to raise public awareness on the issue. People know that it is important to cherish our heritage. However, knowledge is important to maintain these val-

ues in a proper way. For instance, focusing on issues in Yangon city's urban planning sector."

Without proper planning, Yangon could lose its architectural heritage like many of its Asian neighbors.

U Naing Tun, Building Main-

tenance Specialist said, "Look at the City Hall, its roof has been changed but it's not waterproof at all...and it's absolutely dripping and the High Court too. And also R.I.T. and also Surandi Villa. Though they all need to exist to preserve our heritage, they are go-

ing out of style."

The Yangon City Development Committee in 2001 published a list of 190 heritage buildings, including religious buildings and government offices and other structures from the colonial era.—*GNLM*

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More travellers expected to visit Chaungtha in Thingyan Water Festival



Chaungtha Beach becomes a popular resort for travellers and is one of the top tourist attraction sites in Myanmar. PHOTO: MINMYANMARCKTRAVEL.COM

TOURIST arrivals to Chaungtha Beach are expected to reach about 100,000 per day during the Thingyan Traditional Water Festival in April of this year, said U Kyaw Khaing, chairman of Chaungtha Zone Hoteliers Association.

Chaungtha Beach is a popular resort and one of the top tourist attractions in Myanmar. It is

about a five-hour drive from the commercial capital of Yangon.

The beach hosted about 100,000 visitors daily during the festival last year. Not only hotels and guesthouses but homes of residents were crowded with visitors at home and abroad.

The Chaungtha Zone Hoteliers Association put forth concerted efforts to attract more

visitors by implementing effective environmental conservation programmes to sustain the natural beauty of the beach in cooperation with the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism and relevant organisations. The Chaungtha Beach attracts more local visitors than foreigners, while Ngwehsaung Beach receives lots of international travellers.—200

City authorities find new water sources for Yangon residents

TO MEET the demand for water in the city, the Yangon City Development Committee is searching for new fresh-water sources to supply sufficient drinking water for the city's residents, especially in the summer.

The YCDC is trying to get 100 million gallons of water from the Panhlaing River that flows through Yangon and Ayeiawady Regions, its official said.

The city authorities are currently implementing a project to supply 40 million gallons of water from Lagunpyin reservoir, mainly to townships which face water shortages every summer.

Efforts are being made by the committee to distribute drinking water to residents in Dala Township from Twantay Canal through the pipelines. The project is set to commence this month under the 35-year

agreement signed between the Yangon Region government and Malaysia-based AG Resource Myanmar Co.

Although the region government yearly drills tube wells and creates reservoir ponds across Dala Township, dwellers are still facing water scarcity in summers.

The YCDC currently provides 205 million gallons of water across the city per day.—200

Over 110,000 students in Yangon register for matriculation exam

MORE THAN 110,000 students in Yangon, the largest city in Myanmar, will sit for the national matriculation examination for the 2016-2017 academic year, according to a spokesperson of the Yangon Region Education Office.

Last year, a total of 101,765 students in Yangon took the exam.

Over 114,000 students from Basic Education High Schools, branches and affiliated BE-

HSs, as well as private schools, have registered to take the University entrance examination, which are scheduled from 8 to 17 March.

The education authorities plan to open 217 examination centres in 44 townships in four districts in the region, arranging to open 17 centres for 174 students abroad.

According to the Department of Myanmar Board of Examinations, over 767,000 stu-

dents have already registered for the exam.

Last year, the matriculation examinations were conducted at 1,467 centres — 16 abroad and 1,451 within Myanmar, with over 600,000 students registered to sit the exam.

The department released the timetable for the 2016-2017 AY matriculation examination on 9 December. Students will sit the Myanmar language test on the first day of the exam.—200

Myanmar selects 12 finalists to compete in Asian Archery Championship

THE Myanmar Archery Federation has selected 12 top archers to take part in the Asian Archery Championship to be held in Thailand on 21-25 March.

The Myanmar team will include team leader U Phyo Ko Ko Tint Hsan, second leader U Kyaw Oo, manager Daw Kaythi, coach U Zaw Win Htike and 12 players — Ye Min Swe, Shein Htet Kyaw, Myat Zaw Tun, Naung Ja, Aung Ngeain, Hla Hla San, Yaw Sein Ya, Nyein Sithu, Aung Zin Phyo, Htike Lynn Oo, San Yu Htwe and Zarchi Win.

Not only Asian countries, but some European countries will also participate in the biannual competition organised by the Asian Archery Federation.

This is part of the archers' preparation to take part in the 29th South East Asian Games, which will be hosted by Malaysia from 19 to 31 August this year, with over 400 events in 38 sports to be featured in the games.

Myanmar Archers is now undergoing training for the upcoming competition.—200

Myanmar entrepreneurs invited to take part in Thai programme

YOUNG Myanmar entrepreneurs have been invited to attend the 3rd edition of Young Entrepreneurs Network Development (Yen-D) Program to be held in Thailand in May, according to the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Under the arrangement of Thailand's Department of Foreign Trade, the Yen-D Program Season III is due to take place on 7-11 May of this year in Bangkok, to establish new business links between Thai entrepreneurs and those from

neighbouring countries, including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Viet Nam.

The programme will help young businesspersons build friendships and businesses for the next step of their careers to catch up with market opportunities.

Interested entrepreneurs may send their application forms to the UMFCCI's Member Affairs Department no later than 31 March.

For more information, dial 01 2314344~9 Ext: 136, 140 and contract ma@umfcci.com.mm.— Shwe Khine



LIGHT Pyinnya Dana group is conducting summer English Courses free of charge for all levels at Ward 737/B, Marga Street, Ward 12, South Okkalapa. Patron U Tin Tun and teacher Daw Rosie (Royal Rose) formally opening the summer English courses on 4th March. PHOTO: TN (GNLM)

LOCAL Business

Parboiled rice exports earned nearly US\$ 4 million in ten months

OVER 10,000 tonnes of parboiled rice were exported to foreign countries over the past ten months in the current fiscal year 2016-2017, attaining nearly US\$ 4 million, according to the Commerce Ministry.

The parboiled rice exports mainly flowed into the Russian market. About 500 tonnes of parboiled rice each were shipped to America and Canada this fiscal year. Myanmar's parboiled rice also enters the European market, fetching US\$460 to \$470 per tonne.

Over 3,000 tonnes of parboiled rice are monthly demanded by the Russian market. However, only about 1,500 tonnes are supplied due to lack of production.

The earnings of a tonne of parboiled rice exceeds over 30 per cent of that of low quality rice (Aemahta) because of its higher quality, said U Thaung Win, a rice miller from Hlaingthaya industrial zone.

More parboiled rice mills need to be established as the parboiled rice has already garnered the international market and are being offered a good price. The Commerce Ministry has no plans to set up the parboiled rice mills since agribusiness was already privatised, said U Khin Maung Lwin, the assistant secretary of the Ministry of Commerce.

Previously, there were three parboiled rice mills in Einme, Kyaiklat and Bogale in Ayeyawady Region. And now, more parboiled rice is likely to be exported abroad with an expanded nine mills.

Parboiled rice previously resulted in a foul odour when the rice was soaked into cold water during processing, resulting in a decrease in quality. Odourless parboiled rice was produced later on with the assistance of advanced technology, it is learnt. —200



Farmers plant rice seedlings in Myawady. PHOTO: TUN TUN OO (MYAWADY)

Dividends of FPB to distribute only to entitled shareholders

Those who owns shares at the close business on 31st March are entitled to enjoy First Private Bank (FPB)'s dividends allocated for the current fiscal year 2016-2017, according to an announcement of FPB.

FPB entered Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) on 20th Jan 2017. The dividends of FPB will be distributed to only those entitled shareholders in accordance with the Board of Directors' decision at the meeting (2/2017). The list of shareholders who are entitled to enjoy the dividends will be ratified by YSX on 5th April. Those shareholders who purchase the shares starting from 3rd April 2017 will not be accounted for this. The dividends for this FY will be distributed commencing in June. The shareholders are required to open account at the FPB headquarters and the branches, stated in the announcement.

The share price of FPB on 3rd March 2017 was Ks32,000, with 1,316 shares traded on YSX. —Ko Khant

Total, PTTEP equal in MD-7 project

TOTAL E&P Myanmar Co, which has been given approval to hold a 50% stake in the Myanmar MD-7 project in which PTT Exploration and Production Plc (PTTEP) has the other 50%, will help to reduce risk and add value to the project, the Bangkok Post reported quoting Somporn Vongvuthipornchai, PTTEP president and chief executive officer.

PTTEP through PTTEP South Asia Ltd will remain the key operator in the project located offshore in Moattama Basin, covering 7,798 square kilometres, he said.

Earlier Mr Somporn said Total would initially take the lead in the implementation and later hand it to PTTEP. That would be similar to the development of the Bongkot gas field in the Gulf of

Thailand in 1990 when PTTEP had been inexperienced in petroleum production, said the report.

Exploration was going on at the MD-7 site and officials expected to discover natural gas at a depth of 80 metres.

Yongyos Krongphanich, PTTEP's senior vice president for finance, said this year PTTEP expected to sell 312,000 barrels of petroleum products a day, down from 320,000 last year, due to asset sales in Oman and productivity cuts in the Montara oil and gas field in the Timor sea and in Vietnam.

PTTEP will try to maintain the margin of its earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation at 70% and its production cost per unit at US\$31 per barrel like last year.—GNLM

Pea price rebounds from demand of India

THE pea price has bounced back a bit these days due to India's increased demand, according to Bayintnaung commodity depot.

The price of mung beans increased to Ks1,008,000 from 950,000 per tonne these days. Similarly, the pigeon pea price also rose from Ks730,000 to 760,000 a tonne in early March, according to Myanmar Pulses, Beans & Sesame Seeds

Merchants Association.

On 1st March, a tonne of fair-average quality FAQ mung bean fetched around Ks 964,000, whereas the price of special quality SQ mung bean was Ks1,023,000 per tonne.

The pea price is positively related to the demand of India, which is the main buyer of Myanmar's peas.

Nevertheless, growers are

facing difficulties because of low yield and high cultivation costs.

When the growers started to plant the crops, the peas fetched about Ks 55,000 per basket.

The price was around Ks30,000 per basket at the harvest time, making it difficult for growers to make a profit, said the growers. —Mon Mon

Timber designated for local consumption to be banned from export in April

TIMBER sold for domestic consumption was found to be exported abroad, resulting in the imposition of a ban, said U Thein Toe, the director of the Yangon Region Forest Department.

Previously, timber designated for local use at an auction in local currency was allowed for export to foreign countries.

As of April, this system is no longer permitted and only timber extracted for the external market will be allowed to be exported using US dollars. Starting from the effective date, the previously produced timber will be allowed for export but not for the newly

produced timber. Timber sold by the Forest Department was previously banned for shipment, although that from Myanmar Timber Enterprise is allowed to be sent abroad, it is learnt.

Additionally, Myanmar Timber Enterprise suspended the export of the log, lumber and finished wood products which were sold to the Local Marketing and Milling Department.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation has already informed the businessmen to seek certificates which prove that the forest products are of-

ficially extracted.

The Forest Department has to hand over management of confiscated illegal timber to Myanmar Timber Enterprise which will be sold for local consumption.

A five per cent tax was previously levied on timber exports. The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Bill Joint Committee proposed to levy a 50 per cent tax on the profit of exports in the incumbent government's period.

Out of over 1,500 businessmen in the private finished wood products and lumber enterprise, only 15 are engaged in shipments with containers. —200

China to strengthen defences, no word on budget

BEIJING — China pledged more support for its military on Sunday including strengthening maritime and air defences as it takes steps to safeguard its sovereignty, but in a highly unusual move did not give spending figures for 2017 despite promises of transparency.

Parliament's spokeswoman, Fu Ying, said on Saturday defence spending for this year would rise about 7 per cent, accounting for about 1.3 per cent of gross domestic product — the same level as the last few years.

However, the actual defence spending target for this year was not included in the country's budget released at the opening of parliament's annual session on Sunday, as it has been in previous years.

"We will support efforts to deepen the reform of national defence and the armed forces, with the aim of building a solid defence and strong armed forces that are commensurate with China's international standing and are suited to our national security and development

interests," the government said in a budget report.

It did not elaborate.

State news agency Xinhua also did not report the figure. The Defence Ministry and parliament's spokeswoman did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

China has repeatedly said its defence spending is transparent and it was not clear why defence numbers were not released.

Last year, with the economy slowing, the defence budget recorded its lowest increase in six years, at 7.6 per cent, the first single-digit rise since 2010, following a nearly unbroken two-decade run of double-digit increases.

Military officers attending parliament largely declined to talk to reporters about the budget, much in line with last year when they were instructed to keep complaints about the low rate of the increase to themselves.

"Fu Ying answered this on CCTV yesterday," one of the officers, Major General Li Fengshan, told reporters, dismissing questions about

where the defence budget figures were.

A government official involved in the crafting of Premier Li Keqiang's work report, also delivered to parliament on Sunday, was unable to shed any light on the matter.

"There is nothing secret about it," director of the State Council Research Office Huang Shouhong told reporters at a briefing, repeating Fu's 7 per cent approximation from Saturday and saying that it should be in the budget report.

China's military buildup has rattled nerves around the region, particularly because it has taken an increasingly assertive stance in territorial disputes in the East China Sea, the South China Sea and over Taiwan, which China claims as its own.

In his address to parliament, Premier Li said China would deepen military reforms.

"We will strengthen maritime and air defence as well as border controls and ensure the important operations related to countering terrorism, safeguard-



Military delegates arrive ahead of the opening session of the National People's Congress (NPC) outside the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China on 5 March, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

ing stability, international peacekeeping and providing escorts on the high seas are well organised," he said.

"We will boost military training and preparedness, so as to ensure that the sovereignty, security, and development interests are resolutely and effectively safeguarded."

In a government-arranged interview on Saturday evening, Chen Zhou, a researcher at the Academy of Military Science, said transparency regarding the defence budget was a "historical process".

"It's not that the government says it must not be

made transparent. The man on the street believes that if it is said out loud it could influence national security," he said. The defence budget figure for last year, 954.35 billion yuan (\$138.40 billion), likely understates its investment, according to diplomats, though the number is closely watched around the region and in Washington for clues to China's intentions. A 7 per cent rise for this year based on last year's budget would bring the figure to 1.02 trillion yuan, still only a quarter or so of the US defence budget. The White House has proposed a 10 per cent

increase in military spending to \$603 billion, even though the United States has wound down major wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and is already the world's pre-eminent military power.

There were calls last week for China to announce a commensurate rise in defence spending for this year.

"As far as our development is concerned, defence spending is not enough," Wang Ning, commander of the paramilitary People's Armed Police, told Reuters on the sidelines of parliament. "Such a large country is facing so many security issues."—Reuters

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India's national carrier Air India operates all-women crew flight around the world

NEW DELHI — India's national carrier Air India has claimed to have made history by operating a flight around the world with an all-women crew.

The Air India flight (Boeing 777) departed from

New Delhi on 27 February 27 for San Francisco and returned to the Indian capital on 3 March. The aircraft flew over the Pacific Ocean on its trip to the United States, while its return flight was over the Atlantic

Ocean, encircling the globe, the airline has said. Not only the pilots and the cabin crew, even the check-in and ground-handling staff, engineers, and air traffic controllers who authorised the flight's departure and arrival

were all women, it said. A spokesperson for the carrier told the media that the airline has applied for an entry on the Guinness World Record for this feat ahead of the International Women's Day on 8 March.—Xinhua

Malaysia arrests seven for suspected links to militant groups

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysia has arrested six foreigners and one Malaysian for suspected links to militant groups including Islamic State, the police chief said on Sunday.

The Southeast Asian nation has been on high alert since suicide bombers and gunmen linked to Islamic State launched multiple attacks in Jakarta, the capital of neighboring Indonesia, in January 2016. A grenade attack on a bar on

the outskirts of the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, in June last year wounded eight people.

Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attacks, the first of such attacks on Malaysian soil.

Malaysia has arrested hundreds over the last few years for suspected links to militant groups.

In the latest arrests made between 21 and 26 February, one Malaysian and one Indonesian were

detained for planning to launch a large-scale car bomb attack using a "vehicle borne improvised explosive device," before leaving to join IS in Syria, Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar said in a statement. The two were part of an Islamic State cell that received instructions from Muhammad Wandy Muhammad Jedi — a known Malaysian IS fighter in Syria. One East Asian, with a fake student visa,

had connections to an East Asian militant group that sends its members to Malaysia before heading to Syria to join Islamic State, Khalid said. Four Yemenis arrested were suspected of being part of a Yemeni insurgent group. They were also part of a syndicate forging travel documents. Police seized multiple international passports and 270,000 ringgit (\$60,650) in cash in different currencies from the four.—Reuters

Moderate aftershock in Philippines kills one, hurts 25

MANILA — A moderate earthquake of magnitude 5.9 hit the Philippines on Sunday, killing a woman and hurting 25 people, the Philippine seismic agency and a provincial governor said.

The quake that hit the southern island of Mindanao was an aftershock of a 6.7 magnitude quake on 10 February, which killed four people and hurt more than 100, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and

Seismology said.

The institute said Sunday's quake was of 5.9 magnitude. The US Geological Survey said it was magnitude 5.7. Surigao del Norte Governor Sol Matugas said an elderly woman

died of cardiac arrest while 25 people suffered minor injuries. Two homes collapsed and some properties damaged by last month's quake suffered more damage, she said in a radio interview.—Reuters

LDP passes rule change that could see Abe remain PM until 2021

TOKYO — The ruling Liberal Democratic Party decided Sunday to extend its term limit on party leaders, potentially allowing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to remain in his role until September 2021.

Abe's tenure as president of the LDP was set to run out in September next year before the rule change, which would have meant stepping down as prime minister even if the LDP was still in power.

The party, holding its annual convention at a Tokyo hotel, approved extending the limit to three consecutive three-year terms from the previous two consecutive three-year terms.

This means Abe can stand for re-election in the next party leadership vote in the fall of next year.

Abe, 62, served as prime minister for around a year before resigning in September 2007. He became prime minister again when the LDP returned to power in December 2012 after a three-year period in opposition.

Taking both his stints in power into account, Abe could become the longest serving prime minister in Japanese history if he is still in the role in November 2019.

The three-term plan had been approved in November last year by the LDP's General Council, its main decision-making body, following debate in a party policy taskforce.

Natsuo Yamaguchi, leader of the LDP's junior coalition partner Komeito, appeared to endorse the rule change in his speech at the convention, stressing that



Prime Minister Shinzo Abe addresses the Liberal Democratic Party's annual convention in Tokyo on 7 March 2017. The ruling party decided to extend its term limit for party leaders, potentially allowing Abe to remain LDP president until September 2021. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

"stability in government is the only certain path for us to respond to... the need for this administration to work hard on various issues at home and abroad."

The LDP also adopted Sunday a strategy for this year, centering on making "concrete steps toward" a formal proposal to amend the Japanese Constitution, a longstanding ambition of both Abe and the party.

"It's the historic mission of the LDP, which has held up the backbone of Japan throughout the postwar period, to lead a specific debate toward a proposal to amend the Constitution," Abe said in his address at the convention.

This year marks 70 years since the post-World War II foundational document, under which Japan renounces the right to wage war or possess "war potential," came into force. It has never been amended.

The 2017 strategy states that the LDP will

drive debate in the constitutional commissions in both chambers of the Diet, while "making the path to constitutional amendment clear to the public." It also says the party will promote efforts to expand support for constitutional reform among voters.

An amendment to the Constitution would legally have to win the support of at least two-thirds of lawmakers in both houses of the Diet before gaining a majority of votes in a national referendum.

The ruling coalition and pro-amendment opposition parties already have a two-thirds majority, but would likely need to reach some sort of consensus with opposition parties in light of public sensitivity over the Constitution.

Sunday's convention was also a chance for the LDP to whip up excitement among the party faithful ahead of the Tokyo metropolitan assembly election in July.—Kyodo News

Malaysia expels North Korean envoy after Kim Jong Nam murder

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysia said on Saturday it was expelling the North Korean ambassador, escalating a diplomatic row between the two countries over the murder of the estranged half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Ambassador Kang Chol was declared "persona non grata" and asked to leave Malaysia within 48 hours.

Kim Jong Nam, the leader's half-brother, was murdered on 13 February at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, after being assaulted by two women who Malaysian police believe smeared his face with VX, a nerve

agent classified by the United Nations as a weapon of mass destruction.

The ambassador had said last month that Pyongyang "cannot trust" Malaysia's handling of the investigation, and accused the country of "colluding with outside forces", in a veiled reference to bitter rival South Korea.

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak called the comments "diplomatically rude". Foreign Minister Anifah Haji Aman said in a statement on Saturday that Malaysia had demanded an apology from the ambassador, but none was forthcoming.

"Malaysia will react strongly against any insults made against it or any attempt to tarnish its reputation," Anifah said.

US and South Korean officials have said Kim Jong Nam was killed by agents of North Korea. Malaysia deported a North Korean suspect in the case on Friday. Earlier this week, Malaysia said it would cancel visa-free entry for North Koreans entering the country from 6 March. Anifah said in the statement that this move was "an indication of the government's concern that Malaysia may have been used for illegal activities."—Reuters

Extension of Invitation for Bids

Date: 6th March, 2017

Loan Agreement No.:MY-P4 dated 5th September, 2014

IFB No.:MR/BD/104

1. The Government of Republic of the Union of Myanmar has received a loan from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) towards the cost of the Yangon-Mandalay Railway Improvement Project Phase I. It is intended that part of the proceeds of this loan will be applied to eligible payments under the contract for Package CP104: Rolling Stock.
2. Bidding will be conducted through procedures in accordance with the applicable Guidelines for Procurement under Japanese ODA Loans, and is open to all Bidders from eligible source countries, as defined in the Loan Agreement. The Eligible Nationality of the Bidders shall be Japan in the case of the prime contractor. In case where the prime contractor is a joint venture, such joint venture will be eligible provided that the nationality of the lead partner is Japan, that the nationality of the other partner is Japan and/or the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and that the total share of work of Japanese partners in the joint venture is more than fifty percent (50%) of the contract amount.
3. Myanmar Railways, Ministry of Transport and Communications now invites sealed Bids from interested eligible Bidders for the design, execution and completion of Rolling Stock (Diesel Electric Multiple Unit) ("the Works"). International Competitive Bidding will be conducted in accordance with JICA's Single-Stage Bidding Procedure.
4. Interested eligible Bidders may obtain further information from and inspect the Bidding Documents at the head office of Myanmar Railways at the address shown below, during office hour from 09:30 a.m. to 16:30 p.m. Monday to Friday.

Address : Tender Office, Myanmar Railways Head Office, Nay Pyi Taw Railway Station Compound, Pobbathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar
Telephone: +95-67-77011
 : +95-67-77024
Facsimile number: +95-67-77012
 : +95-67-77164
Electronic mail address: gmmne.rail@mrt.gov.mm ,
 dgmplan.rail@mrt.gov.mm
5. A complete set of Bidding Documents may be purchased by interested eligible Bidders on the submission of a written application to the address above and upon payment of a non-refundable fee of United States Dollar one thousand (1,000 US\$). Unless Bidder's eligibility is confirmed the Employer will decline to provide any Bid information.
6. Bids must be delivered to the address above on or before 14:00 p.m. on 9th March 2017 and must be accompanied by a bid security of Japanese Yen one hundred and twenty five million (JPY 125,000,000).
7. Myanmar Railways has already informed that the opening of Technical Bids will take place on 7th April 2017. However, in order to convenience the interested eligible applicants' document preparation, Myanmar Railways extend the date to 25th May 2017 at 14 : 00 at Myanmar Railways Head Office Conference Room, Nay Pyi Taw.
8. If Bidder is only one, the Employer may consider returning his Bid unopened.

Myanmar Railways, Ministry of Transport and Communications
Managing Director

Nay Pyi Taw Railway Station Compound,
Pobbathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar
Telephone: +95-67-77011

 : +95-67-77024

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We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email ce@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com with your name and title.

Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish "Letter to the Editor" that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.

All stakeholders responsive and effective in democratization

Tha Sein

THE greatest national endeavor of the government is to resolve one of the world's longest-running civil wars. Towards this end, it has made the peace process our priority, initiating a dialogue open to all armed ethnic groups. Since the Second Meeting of the Union Peace Conference—21st Century Panglong will take place in the month of March 2017, terms and conditions of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) should be respected both in spirit and in letter.

The NCA is the first step not only towards peace, but towards the establishment of

the long hoped for Democratic Federal Union. Some organizations have already signed the NCA, but there are also those that for various reasons have not yet signed. As future political dialogues need to be based on the NCA, the government has been making every effort to ensure the participation of the non-signatories, emphasizing the fact that national reconciliation is the concern of all Union citizens.

Since its inception it has been the aim of the NLD-led government to hold political negotiations based on the Panglong spirit and the principles of finding solutions

through the guarantee of equal rights, mutual respect, and mutual confidence between all ethnic nationalities. The government will not abdicate its responsibility to bring together all ethnic nationalities and has been quick to quash any speculations over unequal treatment towards any ethnic nationality.

So long as we are unable to achieve national reconciliation and national unity, we will never be able to establish a sustainable and durable peaceful Union. Only when our country is at peace will we be able to stand on equal footing with other countries in our region and countries

all over the world.

To resolve the political problems that lie at the root of our armed conflicts, the most crucial element is to work together with mutual understanding and trust, to seek solutions. Democratic change does not happen overnight but it is truly a hard-fought process. Realizing this, all national brethren need to exercise considerable restraint with Panglong spirit and focus on resolving the problems, rather than inflating them to ensure that all stakeholders are responsive and play an effective role in the democratization process.

Water and soil muddy carbon budget thinking

New research on soil, ponds and lakes means a rethink is needed on how to help tackle climate change by balancing the carbon budget.

Tim Radford

CLIMATE scientists, struggling with the enduring problem of the carbon budget, may have to think again as a result of new research findings.

One experiment, in the UK, has shown that the ponds, lakes and standing water that cover 4% of the Earth that isn't glaciated could release perhaps twice as much greenhouse gas as they warm this century.

And a second study, in the US, has demonstrated that climate scientists have seriously over-estimated the soil's capacity to absorb carbon. It may be able to soak up only about half as much as they thought.

Carbon budget headache

The carbon budget is the first and biggest headache of climate research.

For the last 10,000 years or so, carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere hovered at around 280 parts per million. Plants built their tissues from atmospheric carbon, animals devoured plants and released most of the carbon again as a greenhouse gas, and planetary temperatures hovered around a long-term average.

Then, 200 years ago, humans began burning coal and oil that had been locked away in the sedimentary rocks for more than 100 million years, releasing ancient carbon back into the atmosphere.

Some of it is absorbed by the forests, some of it ends up as shells and fishbones in the ocean, and some of it is pre-

To make sense of what will happen in the next decades, climate scientists urgently need accurate estimates of how much atmospheric carbon will be sequestered in the soils and water, and how much will linger in the atmosphere.

"Warming can fundamentally alter the carbon balance of small ponds – reducing their ca-

over a seven-year period, they warmed experimental ponds by between 4°C and 5°C – which is what the atmospheric temperatures will rise by in this century unless there are drastic cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.

They then studied the levels of carbon dioxide stored in the ponds and the rate at which another greenhouse gas, methane, is released.

In the seven-year span, the ponds' ability to store carbon dioxide was reduced by half, while methane release almost doubled.

Soil carbon data

"Our findings show that warming can fundamentally alter the carbon balance of small ponds over a number of years, reducing their capacity to absorb carbon dioxide and increasing emissions of methane," says Gabriel Yvon-Durocher, chair in ecology at the Environment and Sustainability Institute at the University of Exeter, who led the study. "This could ultimately accelerate climate change."

Meanwhile, the soil around the ponds could add to the problem.

Climate models make assumptions – one being that the

carbon locked away in the world's topsoil is about 450 years old. But researchers from US universities did no experiments: they just analysed soil carbon data from 157 soil samples around the world, and did the sums.

They report in Science journal that soil carbon age was in fact a great deal older than the standard estimates. Rather than 430 years, plus or minus 50 years, the carbon residue was about 3,100 years old, plus or minus 1,800 years.

This means that the existing models have over-estimated, by a factor of two, the rate at which carbon is sequestered in soil.

"Therefore, a greater fraction of CO₂ emissions than previously thought could remain in the atmosphere and contribute to global warming," they conclude. – Climate News Network

"Warming can fundamentally alter the carbon balance of small ponds — reducing their capacity to absorb carbon dioxide and increasing emissions of methane"

served in the silts of lakes and ponds.

But some stays in the atmosphere to raise planetary temperatures to increasingly alarming levels – with carbon dioxide ratios having tipped 400 parts per million, and global average temperatures on average having already risen by 1°C.

capacity to absorb carbon dioxide and increasing emissions of methane"

That is why the results of a simple set of experiments conducted by UK universities could be bad news for attempts to balance the carbon budget.

Scientists report in Nature Climate Change journal that,

(Tim Radford, a founding editor of Climate News Network, worked for The Guardian for 32 years, for most of that time as science editor. He has been covering climate change since 1988.)

Obese people may get less 'comfort care' at the end of life

PITTSBURGH — Obese people in the US may not receive the same kind of care at the end of their lives as people who are thin or normal weight, suggests a new study.

Before they died, obese patients were less likely to enroll in hospice care, spent less time in hospice and were less likely to die at home than thinner people, researchers found.

End-of-life care was also more costly for obese people.

"People with obesity deserve high-quality care, but may not be receiving it at the end of life," said lead author Dr John Harris, of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine in Pennsylvania.

More than a third of US adults are obese, according to the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

Harris and his colleagues note

in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* that aside from health risks, obesity may present technical and logistical challenges during physical examinations and certain medical procedures.

Previous research also shows that stigma about weight affects how doctors and patients behave, they write.

To see how body weight is linked to healthcare at the end of life, the researchers used data collected between 1998 and 2012 from 5,677 people on Medicare, the US government's health insurance programme for the elderly and disabled.

None of the participants were living in nursing homes or other institutions. The data were drawn from the last six months of their lives.

Based on body mass index

(BMI), a measure of weight in relation to height, 7 per cent of participants were underweight with a BMI of 18.5 or below, 44 per cent were normal weight with a BMI of 18.5 to 24.9, 31 per cent were overweight with a BMI of 25 to 29.9 and the rest were obese or morbidly obese with a BMI of at least 30.

A 5-foot-5-inch person weighing 120 pounds would have a BMI of 20, in the normal range. A person of the same height who weighed 240 pounds would be morbidly obese, with a BMI of about 40. The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute provides a BMI calculator online (bit.ly/2lHXqP2).

The researchers found a 38 per cent probability that people with a BMI of 20 would enter hospice care toward the end of life,

compared to about 23 per cent among people with a BMI of 40.

Hospice care, which can be provided in home or at a facility, provides physical support, including pain control, and emotional support for patients and families dealing with terminal illnesses.

When people with a BMI of 40 did receive hospice care, it was typically for a shorter time than normal-weight people.

"It looks like people weren't getting enrolled, and they got there later if they were enrolled," Harris told Reuters Health.

The researchers also found that obese people had lower odds of dying at home, which is a typically a wish for people at the end of life. Their likelihood of dying at home was 55 per cent, compared to 61 per cent for normal-weight patients.

Gaps in care generally rose as BMI increased, the researchers found.

"It seems like people with obesity are getting lower quality of care at the end of life," said Harris.

The cost of care was also higher when BMI was higher, they found. The study can't say why these gaps exist, but the researchers suggest it may have to do with obese people looking less gaunt toward the end of life and not being referred for hospice. Or, they may be unable to find a hospice program that can accommodate their healthcare and family's needs.

The healthcare systems need to make sure it's offering everyone the same level of care, said Harris.

His overarching goal, Harris said, is to improve the quality of care for people with obesity. —Reuters

NASA Mars satellite shifts course to avoid hitting planet's moon

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A NASA science satellite orbiting Mars was forced to make a rare evasive maneuver to avoid a collision next week with one of the planet's two small moons, the US space agency said on Thursday.

Flight controllers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, commanded the MAVEN spacecraft, which is studying Mars' vanishing atmosphere, to fire up its engine on Tuesday to boost its speed by about 1.3 feet per second (0.4 metres per second).

The acceleration was necessary to slightly shift MAVEN's orbit and steer the satellite clear of the Martian moon Phobos, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration said in a statement.

Without the tweak, MAVEN and the small, lumpy moon would have reached the same point in space within seven seconds of one

another next Monday, 6 March. In its new orbit, MAVEN will miss Phobos by about 2-1/2 minutes, NASA said.

MAVEN is in an egg-shaped orbit that regularly crosses the paths of other science satellites and of Phobos, which circles just 6,000 miles (9,656 km) above the Martian surface, closer than any other known moon to a planet in the solar system. At that distance, Phobos whips around Mars three times a day.

Flight controllers regularly monitor MAVEN's path for potential collisions. Tuesday's evasive action was the first time MAVEN had to dodge the potato-shaped Phobos, which measures about 10 by 14 miles by 11 miles (16 by 22.5 by 18 km).

MAVEN, short for Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution, reached the red planet in September 2014. —Reuters



Phobos, the largest of Mars's two moons, taken by the high resolution Imaging Science Experiment (HIRISE) camera on NASA's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter is shown in this April 9, 2008 image provided by NASA on 2 March, 2107. PHOTO: REUTERS

Elephants may sleep less than any other mammal



A male elephant grazes during an exercise to fit them with advanced satellite radio tracking collar to monitor their movement and control human-wildlife conflict near Mt. Kilimanjaro at the Amboseli National Park, in Kenya on 2 November, 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

WASHINGTON — There's an old saying that elephants never forget. You also can say they almost never sleep.

Scientists on Wednesday said a first-of-its-kind study tracking the sleep behaviour of wild elephants found the world's largest land mammal sleeps two hours per day on average, and some days not at all, and does so mostly standing up.

This represented the shortest-known sleep time of any mammal. Previous research showed captive elephants got four to six hours daily.

"Sleep needs to be studied in an animal's natural environment if we are truly to understand it," said Paul Manger, a research professor in the School of Anatomical Sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa who led the study published in the journal PLOS ONE.

The researchers monitored two free-roaming female African

elephants in Botswana's Chobe National Park for 35 days. They got data to track sleep accurately from a wristwatch-sized device implanted under the skin of the trunk that was not harmful to the animals. They used a satellite-tracking collar with a gyroscope to monitor their location and sleep position.

"We do feel these two elephants are representative of the broader population," Manger said, adding he hoped future research could be done with larger numbers of wild elephants, including males.

The elephants sometimes went up to 46 hours without sleep while walking distances of about 19 miles (30 km), possibly to avoid threats like lions or human poachers.

They typically slept somewhere between 2 am and 6 am. After a sleepless night, they had no extra sleep the next night. The maximum sleep recorded was

five hours in a day. They spent just 17 per cent of their sleeping time lying down.

The next shortest sleepers among mammals may be domestic horses, which get under three hours daily. Some mammals have been shown in captivity to sleep most of the day, including the little brown bat (19 hours), opossum (18 hours) and armadillo (17 hours), Manger said.

People average roughly six to nine hours, Manger said.

The elephants appeared to experience rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, associated with more dreaming and body movements and loss of muscle tone, only every three to four nights.

"REM sleep is often associated with the consolidation of memories. However, we do know elephants have good memories, so this finding contradicts one central hypothesis of REM sleep function," Manger said. —Reuters

Trump administration to propose 'dramatic reductions' in foreign aid



Director of the Office of Management and Budget Mick Mulvaney (L) and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin (R) flank US President Donald Trump as he hosts a "strategic initiatives" lunch at the White House in Washington, US on 22 February, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

WASHINGTON — The White House budget director confirmed on Saturday that the Trump administration will propose "fairly dramatic reductions" in the US foreign aid budget later this month.

Reuters and other news outlets reported earlier this week that the administration plans to propose to Congress cuts in the budgets for the US State Department and Agency for International Development by about one third.

"We are going to propose to reduce foreign aid and we are going to propose to spend that money here," White House Office of Management Budget director Mick Mulvaney told Fox News on Saturday, adding the proposed cuts would include "fairly dramatic reductions in foreign aid."

Mulvaney said the cuts in

foreign aid would help the administration fund a proposed \$54 billion expansion of the US military budget.

"The overriding message is fairly straightforward: less money spent overseas means more money spent here," said Mulvaney, a former South Carolina Representative.

The United States spends just over \$50 billion annually on the State Department and US-AID, compared with \$600 billion or more each year on the Pentagon.

Several Republicans this week on Capitol Hill raised concerns about the planned cuts to the State Department.

"I am very concerned by reports of deep cuts that could damage efforts to combat terrorism, save lives and create opportunities for American work-

ers," said US Representative Ed Royce, the Republican chairman of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee.

A US government website said 20 government agencies plan to award \$36.5 billion in foreign assistance programs in more than 100 countries around the world during the current budget year.

Senator Marco Rubio, a Florida Republican, tweeted earlier this week: "Foreign Aid is not charity. We must make sure it is well spent, but it is less than 1% of budget & critical to our national security."

Mulvaney said the Trump administration will release its budget proposal on 16 March. Reuters has reported the administration plans significant proposed cuts in many other domestic program—Reuters

UK should make unilateral offer on post-Brexit rights of EU citizens — lawmakers

LONDON — The British government should make a unilateral decision now to protect the post-Brexit rights of European Union nationals living in Britain, a committee of lawmakers said in a report published on Sunday.

Prime Minister Theresa May has said she wants the issue to be dealt with as a priority in upcoming Brexit negotiations but is not prepared to offer a guarantee until other EU states agree to a reciprocal deal for Britons living abroad.

"They did not have a vote in the referendum, but the result has left them living under a cloud of uncertainty," Hilary Benn, an opposition Labour lawmaker and chair of the Exiting the EU Committee, said in a statement.

"They do not want to be used as bargaining chips. Although the government has said it wants EU citizens to be able to remain, this has not offered sufficient reassurance that the rights and status that they have enjoyed will be guaranteed. It should now do so."

Parliament's upper house inflicted a defeat on May this week, voting for a change to her Brexit plan that says she can only trigger formal divorce talks with the European Union if she promises to protect the rights of EU citizens living in Britain.

May is hoping to overturn that change when the legislation returns to the lower house of parliament.

The Exiting the EU committee, made up of lawmakers

from all the main political parties, also said the current process by which EU nationals can apply for permanent residence was not fit for purpose and should be streamlined.

With an estimated 3 million EU nationals living in Britain, the government need to put extra resources in place to deal with the number of applications it could face, the committee said, adding that it should announce as soon as possible what the cut-off date would be for EU citizens arriving in Britain.

"We were told that at pre-referendum rates of processing, giving residence documents to all potentially eligible applicants using the current system would take the equivalent of 140 years," said Benn. —Reuters

NEWS IN BRIEF

French presidential candidate Fillon's wife says he should battle on

PARIS — The wife of embattled French presidential candidate Francois Fillon said in an interview on Sunday that the work she had carried out for him was real and that she wanted him to continue his campaign until the end.

"He needed someone that carried out his tasks," Penelope Fillon told Le Journal du Dimanche newspaper in her first public remarks since allegations that her husband paid her for fake jobs surfaced. "If it hadn't been me, he would have paid someone else to do it, so we decided that it would be me."

She added that she was telling her husband everyday that he should "continue until the end," but the final decision would be down to him.—Reuters

Brexit "mood music" better, EU more pragmatic — Hammond

LONDON — The tone of private discussions between Britain and other members of the European Union about Brexit has improved since earlier this year, British finance minister Philip Hammond said on Sunday.

"Whatever is being said publicly ahead of the negotiation, the private messaging is that people are now engaging with this more as a shared problem, something that we have to solve together," Hammond told ITV television in an interview.

"There is an increasingly pragmatic approach," he said.

Hammond suggested in a German newspaper in January that Britain could use its corporate tax levels as a form of leverage in the negotiations about its future relationship with the European Union.—Reuters

Blast kills at least 3 in Mexico town hit by December fireworks explosion

MEXICO CITY — Three people were killed on Saturday when a house where fireworks were being made blew up in the same town recently hit by a devastating explosion of a fireworks market, local authorities said.

The house, in a residential neighborhood of Tultepec outside Mexico City, was destroyed by the blast, which sent a large plume of smoke into the air, according to TV images.

Two children and a woman were killed, the State of Mexico government said in a statement, noting that fireworks were being made in the home. Seven more people were injured, it said.

The cause of the explosion was not immediately clear. The state's Red Cross said on its Twitter account that there had been a gas leak.

A series of massive explosions destroyed a fireworks market in Tultepec in December and killed more than three dozen people.—Reuters

Finland's eurosceptic leader Soini says will step down from party helm

HELSINKI — Finnish foreign minister Timo Soini said on Sunday he would step down from the helm of his nationalist and eurosceptic Finns party in June, in a move which is seen challenging the future of the country's three-party government.

"I will not seek a new term from the party congress in June. It is time for something else," Soini wrote in a blog. "This was not an easy decision."

He said he would like to keep the role of foreign minister, but added that that is dependent on whether the party will continue in the government.

Soini, 54, co-founder of his party, helped the group rise from obscurity with a tough opposition to euro zone sovereign bailouts. But the party has seen its support drop after it joined the government for the first time in 2015.—Reuters

Syrian pilot whose plane crashed in Turkey found by rescue team-agency

ISTANBUL — A Syrian pilot who bailed out as his warplane crashed on Turkish territory has been found by a Turkish rescue team and taken to hospital, the Dogan news agency said on Sunday.

It said he had been found around 40 km (25 miles) from the wreckage of his aircraft. He was first taken to a gendarmerie base and then to Hatay region State Hospital. There were no details of his condition.—Reuters

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS SCHEDULE															
YANGON TO BANGKOK				BANGKOK TO YANGON				YGN TO ICN				ICN TO YGN			
Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
TG-304	09:50	11:45	Daily	TG-303	8:00	8:45	Daily	KE-472	23:30	7:50	Daily	KE-471	18:30	22:30	Daily
TG-302	15:00	16:55	Daily	TG-301	13:15	14:00	Daily	YGN TO KUL				KUL TO YGN			
TG-306	19:50	21:45	Daily	TG-305	18:05	18:50	Daily	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
PG-706	6:00	8:15	Daily	PG-701	8:45	9:40	Daily	AK-505	8:30	12:45	Daily	AK-504	6:55	8:00	Daily
PG-702	10:30	12:25	Daily	PG-707	13:45	14:40	Daily	AK-503	19:10	23:30	Daily	AK-502	17:20	18:30	Daily
PG-708	15:30	17:25	Daily	PG-703	16:45	17:35	Daily	8M-501	16:10	20:10	2	8M-502	16:45	17:45	1
PG-704	18:20	20:15	Daily	PG-705	20:30	21:45	Daily	8M-501	11:45	15:45	1	8M-502	21:10	22:10	2
8M-335	7:30	9:15	Daily	8M-336	10:15	11:00	Daily	MH-741	11:15	15:40	Daily	MH-742	13:55	15:05	1,4,6,7
8M-331	16:30	18:15	Daily	8M-332	19:20	20:05	Daily	MH-743	16:00	20:15	1,4,6,7	MH-740	09:10	10:15	Daily
UB-017	17:45	19:15	Daily	UB-020	10:35	11:10	3,5	YGN TO KMG				KMG TO YGN			
UB-019	8:00	9:30	3,5,7	UB-018	21:05	21:35	Daily	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
UB-019	8:55	10:25	1,6	UB-020	11:30	12:05	1,6	CA-416	12:30	16:00	Daily	CA-415	10:50	11:30	Daily
YGN TO DMK				DMK TO YGN				MU-2032	15:30	18:50	Daily	MU-2031	13:50	14:30	Daily
Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	MU-2012	12:55	19:55	3	MU-2011	08:20	11:55	3
FD-252	8:30	10:20	Daily	FD-251	7:15	8:00	Daily	YGN TO TPE				TPE TO YGN			
FD-256	12:55	14:40	Daily	FD-255	11:35	12:25	Daily	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
FD-254	17:35	19:25	Daily	FD-253	16:20	17:05	Daily	CI-7916	10:50	16:10	Daily	CI-7915	7:00	9:50	Daily
FD-258	21:40	23:30	Daily	FD-257	20:15	21:10	Daily	YGN TO PEK				PEK TO YGN			
DD-4231	08:00	9:45	Daily	DD-4234	10:30	11:15	Daily	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
DD-4235	12:00	13:45	Daily	DD-4230	6:30	7:15	Daily	CA-906	23:50	0550+1	1,3,5,7	CA-905	19:30	22:50	1,3,5,7
DD-4239	21:00	22:55	Daily	DD-4238	19:25	20:15	Daily	YGN TO HAN				HAN TO YGN			
SL-201	11:00	13:35	Daily	SL-206	17:10	18:35	Daily	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
SL-207	19:45	21:45	Daily					VN-956	19:10	21:30	Daily	VN-957	16:40	18:10	Daily
YGN TO CAN				CAN TO YGN				YGN TO SGN				SGN TO YGN			
Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
8M-713	20:25	01:00+1	1	8M-714	2:05	3:40	2	VN-942	12:10	14:55	2,3,4,5,7	VN-943	9:25	11:10	2,3,4,5,7
8M-711	8:40	13:15	2,4,5,7	8M-712	14:15	15:50	2,4,5,7	YGN TO HKG				HKG TO YGN			
CZ-3056	11:35	15:50	3,6	CZ-3055	8:40	10:35	3,6	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
CZ-3056	17:40	22:20	1,5	CZ-3055	14:40	16:40	1,5	KA-251	1:05	5:25	Daily	KA-250	21:50	23:45	1,3,5,7
YGN TO SIN				SIN TO YGN				UB-8027	09:00	13:30	1,3,5,7	KA-252	22:20	00:10	2,4,6
Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	YGN TO DOH				UB-8028	14:50	16:20	1,3,5,7
8M-231	8:20	12:40	Daily	8M-232	13:45	15:15	Daily	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	DOH TO YGN			
SQ-997	10:25	15:10	Daily	SQ-998	07:55	09:20	Daily	QR-919	8:05	11:30	1,3,4,6,7	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
MI-515	14:20	18:50	1,3,5	MI-522	11:30	15:30	4,6	YGN TO CNX				QR-918	20:10	5:20	1,3,4,6,7
MI-519	17:35	22:10	Daily	MI-518	15:15	16:40	Daily	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	CNX TO YGN			
MI-522	16:20	20:50	4,6	MI-516	12:00	13:25	1,3,5	PG-724	13:40	15:35	Daily	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
MI-533	13:35	20:50	2	MI-533	11:30	12:45	2	YGN TO DAC				PG-723	12:00	12:55	Daily
3K-584	19:40	00:10	Daily	3K-583	17:30	19:00	Daily	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	DAC TO YGN			
3K-582	11:35	16:05	Daily	3K-581	09:10	10:40	Daily	BG-061	16:45	18:30	1,3,6	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
TR-2823	9:25	13:55	1,2,4,5,7	TR-2822	7:20	8:45	1,2,4,5,7	MDL TO DMK				BG-060	13:30	16:00	1,3,6
UB-001	7:15	11:45	Daily	UB-002	13:00	14:30	Daily	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	DMK TO MDL			
YGN TO NRT				NRT TO YGN				FD-245	12:55	15:15	Daily	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days	YGN TO TPE				FD-244	11:10	12:25	Daily
NH-814	22:10	06:45	Daily	NH-813	11:00	16:30	Daily								

AIRLINE CODES

8M = Myanmar Airways International

BG = Biman Bangladesh Airlines

MH = Malaysia Airlines

MU = China Eastern Airlines

NH = All Nippon Airways

SQ = Singapore Airways

PG = Bangkok Airways

UB = Myanmar National Airlines

VN = Vietnam Airline

3K = Jet Star

AI = Air India

CI = China Airlines

DD = Nok Airline

KA = Dragonair

MI = Silk Air

TG = Thai Airways

AK = Air Asia

CA = Air China

CZ = China Southern

FD = Air Asia

KE = Korea Airlines

QR = Qatar Airways

TR = Tiger Airline

DAY

1 = Monday

2 = Tuesday

3 = Wednesday

4 = Thursday

5 = Friday

6 = Saturday

7 = Sunday

Expert says Islamic State has badly damaged major Palmyra monument

PALMYRA, (Syria) — Islamic State militants have severely damaged a major Roman monument in the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra, an antiquities official said after visiting the site on Saturday.

Under heavy Russian air cover, the Syrian army and allied militias drove the jihadist group out of the UNESCO world heritage site on Thursday, two months after it had seized it in a surprise advance.

It was the second time the city had been recaptured from the militants in the course of Syria's six-year war.

Antiquities official Wael Hafyan said he had seen serious damage to the Tetrapiyon, a square stone platform with matching structures of four columns positioned at each corner. Only four of the 16 columns were still standing.

"The terrorists detonated it... the damage is extensive," he told Reuters. However, he said some of the fallen columns were not destroyed and could be restored using modern conservation techniques.

There was also harm, but less serious, to the facade of a Roman theater, where the damage was to a part that was restored, not original, he said.

Hafyan said the militants had caused less destruction during their second occupation of the city than in their first, when they ruined an 1,800-year-old monumental arch and the nearly 2,000-year-old Temple of Baalshamin.

"These two places are not in that same danger and the extent of destruction of the first occupation, when the damage was much more savage," Hafyan added. He said it would take some time to make a full technical assessment of the historic sites.

Known as the Pearl of the Desert, Palmyra, about 215 km (135 miles) northeast of Damascus, was a prosperous city on the ancient Silk Road trading route.

The militants have smashed ancient structures in Iraq and Syria they say do not conform to their strict interpretation of Islam.—Reuters

US-backed Iraqi forces launch fresh push toward Mosul old city centre

BAGHDAD — US-backed Iraqi forces launched on Sunday a new push toward the Islamic State-held old city centre of Mosul, on the western bank of the Tigris river, an Iraqi military spokesman said.

Iraqi forces are fighting their way toward the old centre of the city, advancing from the south and the southwest, Brigadier-General Yahya Rasool, spokesman for the joint operations command, told state-run television. Iraqi forces captured the eastern side of Mosul in January after 100 days of fighting and launched their attack on the districts that lie west of the Tigris river on 19 February.

Their advance in western Mosul paused over the past 48 hours because of bad weather. Defeating Islamic State in Mosul would crush the Iraqi wing of the caliphate declared by the group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in 2014, over parts of Iraq and Syria.

Rapid Response soldiers, progressing from the south through the Dawasa and Danadan districts, are within a few hundred metres from the government buildings near the old city, a media officer with these interior



An Iraqi special forces soldier helps a family carry their child to cross from Islamic State controlled part of Mosul to Iraqi forces controlled part of Mosul, Iraq on 4 March, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

ministry units told Reuters.

Taking the sites of the provincial council and governorate buildings would help Iraqi forces attack the militants in the nearby old city and would be of symbolic significance in terms of restoring state authority over Mosul.

The buildings themselves are destroyed and not being used by Islamic State.

US-trained Counter-Terrorism Service units meanwhile pushed through Tal al-Ruman and the Somood districts, in the southwest, Rasool said.—Reuters



China's Premier Li Keqiang attends the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) as attendants serve tea at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, on 3 March China, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Premier Li says China will resolutely oppose Taiwan independence

BEIJING — China will resolutely oppose and contain Taiwan independence, Premier Li Keqiang said in remarks prepared for delivery at the opening of the annual meeting of parliament on Sunday, amid heightened tension between Beijing and the self-ruled island.

China is deeply suspicious of Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen, whose ruling Democratic Progressive Party espouses the island's formal independence, a red line for Beijing, which has cut off an official dialogue mechanism with Taipei.

Tsai says she wants peace with China.

"We will never tolerate any activity, in any form or name, which attempts to separate Taiwan from the motherland," Li said in a report available before he delivered an annual address to China's top legislature.

China will protect national sovereignty and territorial integrity while safeguarding peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, Li

said.

Defeated Nationalist forces fled to Taiwan in 1949 after losing a civil war to the Communists. China has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control, viewing it as a wayward province.

In 2014, hundreds of students occupied Taiwan's parliament for weeks in protests known as the Sunflower Movement, demanding more transparency and fearful of China's growing economic and political influence on the democratic island.

Chinese jets and warships carried out exercises near Taiwan and into the Western Pacific on Thursday, as Taiwan's defense minister warned of a growing threat from its giant neighbor.

Li also said the notion of Hong Kong independence would lead nowhere, and Beijing would ensure that the principle of "one country, two systems" is applied in Hong Kong and Macao

"without being bent or distorted".

Hong Kong, a former British colony, returned to Chinese rule in 1997 under a "one country, two systems" formula, granting it extensive autonomy, an independent judiciary and rule of law for at least 50 years.

Hong Kong students organized weeks of protests in late 2014 to push for full democracy, but Beijing declined to make concessions. Chinese leaders are increasingly concerned about a fledgling independence movement in Hong Kong.

China's parliament last year staged a rare interpretation of the Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini-constitution, to effectively bar pro-independence city lawmakers from taking office there.

Communist Party rulers in Beijing have ultimate control over Hong Kong, and some Hong Kong people are concerned they are increasingly interfering to head off dissent.—Reuters

Sikh, told to leave country, shot in Washington state

WASHINGTON — A Sikh man was shot and wounded in Washington state by an attacker who approached him in his driveway and told him to leave the country, police and media reported on Saturday.

The shooting, on Friday night in the city of Kent about 15 miles (24 km) south of Seattle, followed a number of other attacks on Sikhs in the United States over a period of more than a decade.

Hate crime-tracking groups say assailants have occasionally mistaken Sikhs

for Muslims, who have also been victimized in religiously motivated crimes.

The Sikh man was working on his car in the driveway of his home when he was shot in the arm, according to Seattle television station KIRO 7, which spoke to a woman who knows the victim and saw him after he was struck by the bullet.

"Some comments were made to the effect of 'get out of our country, go back to where you're from,' and our victim was then shot," Kent Police Chief Ken Thomas

said at a news conference.

"To think that this could happen in our community was very surprising and extremely disappointing," Thomas said.

Sikh community members stood behind Thomas as he described the shooting. Police believe the suspect, who is at large, is a man, media reported.

The victim was released from hospital, the Seattle Times reported.

A spokesman for Kent police could not be reached for further comment late on Saturday.—Reuters

Extension of Invitation for Prequalification

Date: 6th March, 2017

Loan Agreement No.: MY-P4 dated 5th September, 2014

IFP No : MR/PQ/104

1. The Government of Republic of the Union of Myanmar has received ODA Loan (Loan Agreement dated 5th September, 2014) from Japan International Cooperation Agency toward the cost of the Yangon-Mandalay Railway Improvement Project Phase I (hereinafter referred to as "the Project"). It is intended that part of the proceeds of this Loan will be applied to eligible payments under the contract resulting from the bidding for which this prequalification is conducted.

2. Myanma Railways, Ministry of Transport and Communications, (hereinafter referred to as "the Employer") intends to prequalify suppliers and/or firms for the procurement of rolling stocks under the Project; namely the Package CP104: Rolling Stock (hereinafter referred to as "the Contract").

Brief description of supply under the Contract:

Numbers: 4 train sets of 6-car each (total 24 cars)

Type of car: diesel electric multiple units (DEMU)

Maximum operating speed: 100km per hour

Place of delivery: Insein DRC Depot, 15km away from Yangon

Purpose : operating on the Yangon Mandalay railway line

3. Invitation for Bids is made on the same date of the Invitation for Prequalification for the simultaneous process of Prequalification and Bids.

4. Prequalification will be conducted through procedures in accordance with the applicable Guidelines for Procurement under Japanese ODA Loans, and is open to all Applicants from eligible source countries, as defined in the Loan Agreement. The Eligible Nationality of the Applicants shall be Japan in the case of the prime contractor. In case where the prime contractor is a joint venture, such joint venture will be eligible provided that the nationality of the lead partner is Japan, that the nationality of the other partners is Japan and/or the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and that total share of work of Japanese partners in the joint venture is more than fifty percent (50%) of the contract amount.

5. Interested eligible Applicants may obtain further information from and inspect the Prequalification Documents at Tender Office in the head office of Myanma Railways at Nay Pyi Taw Railway Station Compound, Pobba Thiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, during office hour from 09:30 a.m. to 16:30 p.m. Monday to Friday.

6. A complete set of the Prequalification Documents may be purchased by interested eligible Applicant(s) on the submission of a written Application to the address above and upon payment of non-refundable fee of United States Dollar One Hundred (US\$ 100).

Unless eligibility of Applicant is confirmed the Employer will decline to provide any Prequalification information.

7. Myanma Railway has already informed to submit the Applications for Prequalification on 9th March, 2017, however, in order to convenience the interested eligible applicants' document preparation, Myanma Railways extend the submission date to 25th April, 2017, 14 : 00 p.m. It be clearly marked "Application to Prequalify for Yangon-Mandalay Railway Improvement Project Phase I: Package CP104: Rolling Stock."

8. If Applicant is only one, The Employer may consider returning the application unopened.

Myanma Railways, Ministry of Transport and Communications

Managing Director

Nay Pyi Taw Railway Station Compound,

Pobba Thiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar

Telephone: +95-67-77011

German conservatives edge ahead of Social Democrats in Emnid poll

BERLIN — German Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives took a one point lead over the Social Democrats (SPD) in the latest poll conducted by Emnid for the German newspaper Bild am Sonntag, with nearly seven months to go before federal elections.

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its CSU Bavarian sister party gained one percentage point to reach 33 per cent support, compared with an unchanged 32 per cent for the SPD in a poll of 1,403 people taken from 23 February to 1 March.

The anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party gained one percentage point in the poll to reach 10 per cent, while the ratings for the Left party and pro-environment Green party were unchanged at 8 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively.

The Free Democratic Party lost one percentage point compared to the last poll to reach 6 per cent, just above the 5 per cent threshold needed to take seats in parliament. The increase for Merkel's conservatives came after a surge in support for the SPD that followed its nomination

of former European Parliament President Martin Schulz as its candidate to challenge Merkel in the 24 September national election. Merkel, who is seeking a fourth term in the election, leads a coalition government made up of the CDU/CSU and the centre-left SPD, but Schulz is hoping to win enough votes to form a new government with smaller allies.

The unexpectedly strong gains shown by the SPD — and the CDU/CSU's slide — have prompted some German media to write about "Merkel fatigue" and what

they see as the chancellor's lack of enthusiasm for this year's campaign.

"Angela Merkel suddenly seems like one of those dinosaurs that was incapable of adapting in time, and could only hang around limply waiting for its own extinction," wrote Jakob Augstein, a columnist for Der Spiegel magazine, in Sunday's edition.

But the new Emnid poll and others taken over the past week showed Merkel's conservatives have now stabilised and are now polling neck-and-neck or just ahead of the Social Democrats. —Reuters



German Chancellor Angela Merkel speaks during a news conference with Tunisia's President Beji Caid Essebsi in Tunis, Tunisia on 3 March, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

One killed as local gov't helicopter with 9 aboard crashes in Nagano



Photo taken from a Kyodo News helicopter shows a Nagano prefectural government rescue helicopter that crashed with nine people aboard in a mountainous area in the central Japan prefecture on 5 March, 2017. The helicopter was being used in a mountain rescue drill at the time of the crash. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

NAGANO, (Japan), — One man died on Sunday when a Nagano prefectural government rescue helicopter with nine aboard crashed in a mountainous area in central Nagano, local authorities said.

A man in his 50s, one of three people found unconscious at the scene of the crash, was later confirmed dead, according to the prefecture. The condition of the remaining six was not immediately clear. The helicopter was conducting a mountain rescue drill at the time of the crash, according to the prefecture. The helicopter was carrying seven firefighters, a

pilot and an engineer, all prefectural personnel, according to the prefecture. It took off from Matsumoto airport in Nagano around 1:30 pm and, according to a flight plan filed with the transport ministry, was scheduled to land on the Takabocchi Plateau in Shiojiri in the prefecture at 1:53 pm.

Live TV footage showed a wrecked helicopter on a snowy slope dotted with trees.

The police found the helicopter near Mt Hachibuse at around 3:10 pm. The mountain is located near the border of Matsumoto and Shiojiri. —Kyodo News

More rain, severe weather ahead in south China

BEIJING — Wider areas of south China will be hit by rain and severe weather, the country's national observatory said on Sunday.

From Sunday to Tuesday, regions south of the Yangtze River will continue to experience rain, with parts of Hunan, Jiangxi, Zhejiang and Fujian provinces lashed by moderate to heavy rain, said the National Meteorological Center (NMC).

Sunday marks the day of "Jingzhe" or "Awaken-

ing of Insects," the third of 24 solar terms. In Chinese folklore, the year's first thunder, called "Spring Thunder," is believed to wake the insects.

People should take precautions against lightning and possible severe storms ahead as Jingzhe ushers in higher temperatures and bigger day-night temperature differences, NMC warned.

Meanwhile, a weak cold front will bring temperatures in. —Xinhua

Somalia says 110 dead in last 48 hours due to drought

MOGADISHU — Some 110 people have died in southern Somalia in the last two days from famine and diarrhoea resulting from a drought, the prime minister said on Saturday, as the area braces itself for widespread shortages of food.

In February, United Nations children's agency UNICEF said the drought in Somalia could lead to up to 270,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutri-

tion this year. "It is a difficult situation for the pastoralists and their livestock. Some people have been hit by famine and diarrhoea at the same time. In the last 48 hours 110 people died due to famine and diarrhoea in Bay region," Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire's office said in a statement.

"The Somali government will do its best, and we urge all Somalis wherever they are to help and save the

dying Somalis," he said in the statement released after a meeting of a famine response committee.

In 2011, some 260,000 people starved to death due to famine in Somalia. The country also continues to be rocked by security problems, with the capital Mogadishu and other regions controlled by the federal government coming under regular attack from al Qaeda-linked al Shabaab. —Reuters

Pirates in Nigeria release Russian, Ukrainian sailors: agencies

MOSCOW — Nigerian pirates have released seven Russian and one Ukrainian sailors after they were captured last month on the cargo ship the BBC Caribbean, Russian news agencies reported on Sunday, citing a human rights activist in Crimea.

The sailors were re-

leased after talks between the owners of the ship and pirates.

Interfax news agency quoted human rights activist Pavel Butsay, in the city of Sevastopol, as saying the sailors were at a Frankfurt airport and planned to return home next week.

Butsay told TASS

news agency that a ransom was paid but did not reveal the sum. Security experts class West Africa's waters, especially off Nigeria where many pirates originate, as some of the world's most dangerous, with attackers often targeting oil tankers and holding hostages for ransom. —Reuters

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Plan View: 21'6" width, 18' depth, 7'2" depth.
Front View: 21'6" width, 14'4" height, 7'2" depth.

TRW
(BRN: 200904356H)

No. (31), Room (5), 7 Miles,
Pyay Road, Yangon
T: 09.259.81.36.36
: 09.259.81.37.37
: 09.259.81.46.46

အမှတ်(၃၁)၊ အခန်း (၅)၊ ၇မိုင်၊ ပြည်လမ်း၊ ရန်ကုန်။



File photo: Singer Louis Tomlinson of the band One Direction performs on ABC's Good Morning America inside Central Park in New York, November 26, 2013. PHOTO: REUTERS

One Direction singer arrested at LAX after altercation with paparazzi

LOS ANGELES — Louis Tomlinson, a singer with the “boy band” One Direction, was arrested after getting into a “physical altercation” with a photographer at Los Angeles International Airport, according to police records and media reports on Saturday.

The incident occurred just before midnight on Friday evening when paparazzi encircled Tomlinson near a baggage carousel at the airport, where he had landed with a girlfriend after a flight from Las Vegas, People magazine reported. One of the photographers fell and claimed to be hurt, the magazine said, citing a police report.

The 25-year-old singer was then placed under “citizen’s arrest,” the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s website shows.

Tomlinson is one of four members of the chart-topping pop group also known as 1D, known for its wholesome image and polished pop harmonies that

appeal to a teenage audience. Its hit singles include “What Makes You Beautiful”, “Live While We’re Young”, and “Story of My Life.”

Tomlinson was not at fault in the row, according to entertainment lawyer Martin Singer, who represents him.

“The paparazzi provoked and caused the altercation that occurred with Louis,” he said in a statement. “While the altercation was going on with the paparazzi, three other individuals were attacking his girlfriend during this incident.”

Neither the lawyer or police officials responded immediately to a request for further information.

Tomlinson was booked on misdemeanor battery charges and released on \$20,000 bail, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s website shows. He was scheduled to appear in court on 29 March.—Reuters

Trump says Schwarzenegger not leaving ‘Apprentice’ show voluntarily

WASHINGTON — US President Donald Trump disputed Arnold Schwarzenegger’s announcement about quitting as host of the reality show “The Celebrity Apprentice,” saying on Saturday that Schwarzenegger was leaving involuntarily after drawing few viewers.

Schwarzenegger had announced on Friday that he would not return for a second season of the NBC show. He blamed Trump, an executive producer and former host of the show, for low ratings, describing the president’s involvement as “baggage.”

Trump sees it differently.

“Arnold Schwarzenegger isn’t voluntarily leaving the Apprentice, he was fired by his bad (pathetic) ratings, not by me,” Trump wrote in a message on his personal Twitter account. “Sad end to great show.”

The squabble then continued on Twitter.

“You should think about hiring a new joke writer and a fact checker,” a message on Schwarzenegger’s Twitter account read, responding to Trump.

NBC, a unit of Comcast Corp (CMCSA.O) on



Host Arnold Schwarzenegger poses after a panel for “The New Celebrity Apprentice” in Universal City, California, on 9 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Friday, did not comment on Schwarzenegger’s decision not to return for another season, or on the show’s future.

Schwarzenegger, a movie star and former California governor, took over as host of “Celebrity Apprentice” last year. His first season premiered in January, and was watched by around 4 million to 5 million viewers.

Trump faced criticism over potential conflicts of interests after winning the presidency last November when he said he would

retain an executive producer credit on the show.

On at least one occasion, he has used part of a public appearance as president to scornfully discuss Schwarzenegger’s ratings.

Trump was a celebrity businessman long before he became president, and hosted “The Apprentice” and “The Celebrity Apprentice” for 14 seasons, overseeing contestants competing in business challenges before deciding which ones to fire.—Reuters

Hugh Jackman glad he’s off his Wolverine diet

LONDON — Actor Hugh Jackman is happy that he is no longer dieting for his ‘Wolverine’ roles.

The 48-year-old actor, who made his eighth and final appearance as the Marvel Comics character in “Logan”, says he is “loving” being able to enjoy all sorts of food as now that

he does not have to maintain his body for the role, reported Femalefirst.

“Now I’m eating and loving it. Sometimes waking up at two in the morning just to have breakfast cereal, and then go back to bed. With it still in my lap,” he says on ‘The Late Show with Stephen Colbert’.

“It’s sort of unbelievable to me, what I did for 17 years. The first one, I thought you could get into shape in three weeks. The director pushed all the ‘shirt off’ scenes to the very end. You stop drinking water about 30 hours before you shoot. You lose ten pounds of water weight,” he adds.—PTI

Senegalese filmmaker wins grand prize at African film event

OUAGADOUGOU — Senegalese filmmaker Alain Formose Gomis has won the golden Yennega Stallion, the grand prize of 25th edition of pan-African FESPACO film festival in Ouagadougou.

At the biennial pan-African cinema and television festival known as FESPACO, which concluded on Saturday, Gomis won the golden Yennega Stallion with a reward valued at 20 million CFA francs (about 32,389 US dollars), with the film “Felicity.”

The two runners-up were Beninese Sylvestre Amoussou

with Silver Yennega Stallion and Said Khalaf from Morocco who ranks third with Bronze Yennega Stallion awarded to his film “A Mile in My Shoes.”

“It is a great honor to lift this trophy,” Gomis said, expressing gratitude to all those who helped him achieve the award winning film.

Gomis won the grand prize four years ago for the first time at the 23rd edition of FESPACO.—Xinhua



Actress Natalie Portman arrives at the 89th Oscars Nominee Luncheon in Beverly Hills, California, US on 6 February, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Natalie Portman had second baby, days before Oscar ceremony

LOS ANGELES — Actress Natalie Portman had a great reason for missing Sunday’s Oscar ceremony.

She gave birth to her second child last week but kept the new arrival quiet in the days leading up to the Academy Awards show.

Portman, 35, gave birth to daughter Amalia on 22 February, her publicist said in a statement issued to People magazine on Friday.

Portman, who keeps a low public profile, had said through her publicist a week ago that because of her pregnancy, she would not be attending the 26 February Oscar ceremony in Los Angeles, where she was

nominated in the lead actress category for her performance in “Jackie.”

“Natalie Portman and her husband Benjamin Millepied welcomed a baby girl, Amalia Millepied, on 22 February,” Friday’s statement said. “Mother and baby are happy and healthy.”

Portman and French choreographer Millepied have a 5-year-old son, Aleph. They were married in California in 2012. Portman had been an early Oscar favourite for her performance as former US first lady Jacqueline Kennedy in “Jackie” but the best actress Oscar went instead to “La La Land” star Emma Stone.—Reuters

Garden of illuminated daffodils light up London

LONDON — A garden made up of 2,100 beautiful handmade daffodils will be springing up overnight in the shadows of St Paul’s Cathedral in London to mark the launch of a charity appeal for those living with terminal illness.

The outdoor illuminated installation, named “Garden of Light,” was designed by artist Andrew Shoben and his public art collective Greyworld to mark the launch of the Great Daffodil Appeal by the Marie Curie charitable organization, which provides care and support for people with terminal illnesses and their families.

Each illuminated daffodil represents one of the Marie Curie nurses working across the United

Kingdom.

“Most of our nurses work at night, so they go into people’s homes and provide care for the person who’s dying and support for the family,” said Marie

Curie Chief Executive Dr Jane Collins.

The installation features winding pathways along which people can walk while listening to recordings of voices read-

ing letters of thanks sent to nurses from families of patients they have helped.

The installation will be open for free to the public to enjoy until 12 March. —Reuters



Each illuminated daffodil represents one of the Marie Curie nurses working across the United Kingdom. PHOTO: REUTERS

“I’m a little dazed,” French artist says after living in a rock

PARIS — French artist Abraham Poincheval was freed from a block of stone in a Paris museum on Wednesday after spending seven days enclosed in it.

He entombed himself in a body-shaped slot carved in a limestone boulder on 22 February at Paris’ Palais de Tokyo contemporary art museum.

Poincheval, 44, ate stewed fruit and purees while breathing through an air vent. He had some personal items such as a log book and an emergency

phone line.

“I’m a little dazed, which I imagine is totally normal after one week living in a rock (...) which hosted me well. I thank it very much for having been so enthusiastic about welcoming me,” he told reporters minutes after his release.

“Yes, there were very long moments of loss of self, where suddenly (...) you no longer know where you are, but you are there, and that is what was great (about it),” he said.

The artist was helped out of the room by medical team to the applause of an audience that had gathered to witness his release.

In 2014, Poincheval spent 13 days living inside a hollowed-out bear sculpture, eating worms and beetles to mirror a bear’s diet. —Reuters



French artist Abraham Poincheval poses inside his artwork Pierre (‘Stone’) in Paris, France, on 22 February 2017, before entering the rock as part of his project to live inside for a week. PHOTO: REUTERS



An ancient Siddur, or Jewish prayer book, is displayed at the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem on 20 September, 2014. A 1595 autobiography of Luis de Carvajal will be returned to Mexico this month. PHOTO: REUTERS

Earliest Jewish manuscript in New World to return to Mexico

NEW YORK — The oldest Jewish document of the New World will be returned to Mexico in March, the Mexican consulate in New York said on Friday, more than seven decades after it disappeared.

The document, a 1595 autobiography of Luis de Carvajal, is considered to be an important artifact showing Jewish life on the American continent, but disappeared from Mexico’s national archives more than 75 years ago, according to the consulate.

The manuscript was lent to the museum of the New York Historical Society by the government of Mexico after reportedly resurfacing on the auction circuit in 2015.

Luis de Carvajal, a “converso” Jew in Mexico, was put on trial during the Inquisition and executed in 1596, after he denounced more than 120 other secretly practicing Jews, according to the New York Historical Society.

The “Memorias” manuscript consists of Carvajal’s memoirs, a book of psalms and commandments, and a collection of prayers, Mexico’s consulate in New York said.

The consulate said the manuscript would be returned to Mexico’s Museum of Memory and Tolerance after its exhibition on 12 March.

According to Swann Galleries in New York, where the manuscript was on sale last June, Carvajal’s wrote under a pseudonym and told of his Jewish faith.

After Carvajal was incarcerated, the auction house said, a cell mate exposed his manuscript whereupon Carvajal gave in under torture and was ultimately killed. —Reuters

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Myanmar International

Programme Schedule

(6-3-2017 07:00am ~ -3-2017 07:00am) MST

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	The Rising Glory of Myanmar Arts
07:55	Am	Goldsmith
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	U Kyaw Thu: From Artist to Philanthropist (Part-1)
08:46	Am	Chinlone and the dreams of the player
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Bago : A City of Famous Historic Pagoda
09:47	Am	Myanmar Agarwood
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	Unique Pattern of Myanma...A Trend of Chin Traditional Dress)

(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm)- Sunday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Pm ~ 07:00 Pm) -Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

Prime Time

07:03	Pm	News
07:26	Pm	Food Trip (Ep-3)(Part-2)
07:50	Pm	Cultural Show: Theatrical Make Up
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Discovering Tribes Lisu: Their Life and Customs (Part-2)
08:50	Pm	A Tourist Destination of Shan State

(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) -Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am)- Sunday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Am ~ 07:00 Am) -Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

(For Detailed Schedule – www.myanmaritv.com/schedule)

MRTV

Programme Schedule
(6-3-2017, Monday)

6:00 Am

♦ Paritta by Hilly Region Missionary Sayadaw

7:00 Am

♦ Breakfast News

7:30 Am

♦ MRTV Travelogue

8:45 Am

♦ “Women’s Week Opening Forum” (Business Talk) (LIVE Broadcast)

10:30 Am

♦ Solution for Agriculture)

11:00 Am

♦ 2017 Martrication Examination Lessons (English)

11:30 Am

♦ MRTVs Youth Programme

12:30 Pm

♦ Teleplay

2:30 Pm

♦ Oldies

4:20 Pm

♦ 2017 Martrication Examination Lessons (English)

4:50 Pm

♦ Socio Economic Scenes

5:15 Pm

♦ This Week’s Special Interest

5:35 Pm

♦ Yes or No Talk Show (Needs or Wants) (Review by Prof; Dr Aung Tun Thet)

6:15 Pm

♦ Foot ball Magazine

6:30 Pm

♦ Law Affairs

7:15 Pm

♦ TV Drama Series

8:00 Pm

♦ News/International News/ Weather Report

9:00 Pm

♦ Documentary (Information)

♦ Myanmar Video

Murray wins first title of year in Dubai

DUBAI — World number one Andy Murray won his first title of 2017 with a 6-3, 6-2 victory over unseeded Spaniard Fernando Verdasco in the Dubai Tennis Championships final on Saturday.

Murray lost his first two service games of the match but overcame that poor start to win in Dubai for the first time.

"Obviously I'm very happy to do it here for the first time. It's been a good start to the year," Murray told the BBC.

"Often when you get through matches like that (quarter-final against Philipp Kohlschreiber when I saved seven match points) it settles you down for the rest of the tournament.

"It's been quite a few late finishes this week. Maybe the last couple of matches, I didn't start as well as I would like. It's been the same for all the players, a bit tricky with the rain. Once I got going today, I was moving well and I finished strong.

"This year has given me great momentum." Murray, who had won 12 of his past 13 matches against the Spaniard, started slowly and was broken in the first game before breaking back in what was a nervous start by both players. The heavy-hitting Verdasco cracked a series of powerful winners to break an uncomfortable-looking Murray again in the third game and consolidated to hold for a 3-1 lead. Despite a shaky serving performance, Murray, helped by a string of Verdasco errors, reeled off five successive games to take the first set 6-3. Murray continued in the same vein in the second set and slowly began to dictate from the baseline on the back of an improved serve to open up a 3-1 lead which he did not relinquish.

The three-times grand slam winner, who cut a frustrated figure throughout an uncharacteristically sloppy performance, sealed victory with a powerful serve to claim his 45th career title.

—Reuters



Andy Murray. PHOTO: REUTERS

Real Madrid thrash Eibar without Bale and Ronaldo

BARCELONA — Real Madrid overcame the absence of Gareth Bale and Cristiano Ronaldo to romp to a 4-1 win at tiny Eibar on Saturday and provisionally return to the top of La Liga.

Karim Benzema was the focal point in Real's attack without the suspended Bale and injured Ronaldo and fired the visitors ahead in the 14th minute, following up his own shot on the rebound, before stretching their advantage in the 25th.

James Rodriguez provided the cross for Benzema's second goal and the Frenchman returned the favour for his Colombian team mate to net his first league goal since September in the 29th minute.

Marco Asensio hit the fourth on the hour with a rebound after James had struck the post.

Ruben Pena bundled in a consolation goal for Eibar in the 72nd minute but Real still recorded their biggest win since beating Real Sociedad 3-0 in January.

The victory will lift

Real's confidence after dropping five points in three games. They top the standings on 59 points although Barcelona, on 57, can return to the summit when they host Celta Vigo later on Saturday.

Zinedine Zidane made eight changes to the team that drew 3-3 with Las Palmas on Wednesday. He was forced to do without Ronaldo, who had scored twice against Las Palmas to salvage a point, because of ankle injury.

Midfield anchor Casemiro returned after being rested against Las Palmas to the team's detriment.

He brought stability in midfield while the returning Luka Modric added flair and style, and was even applauded by the Eibar fans.

"It was a very good reaction, we scored three times in the space of half an hour. We knew it was a difficult ground to go to but we scored early and gave a serious display," Zidane told reporters.

"All sorts of things happen during a season and a team can't always play well, but we did very well today and played with a lot of intensity. We made a flying start and that was very important. We know that there's still a long way to go."—Reuters

Wijnaldum seals Liverpool win over Arsenal

LONDON — Liverpool rediscovered flashes of their most vibrant attacking form to repel an Arsenal fightback at a jubilant Anfield on Saturday and leapfrog Arsene Wenger's men in the battle for Champions League places.

Goals from Roberto Firmino, Sadio Mane and Georginio Wijnaldum put Liverpool into third place in the Premier League as they completed their double over the Gunners with the sort of elan — especially in the first half — that they had displayed regularly before the New Year.

Wenger was presented with another difficult evening as his decision to leave top scorer Alexis Sanchez and Theo Walcott on the bench hardly seemed justified amid Liverpool's first-half dominance.

When he brought the Chilean on for the second half with

Arsenal two down, the Gunners perked up with Sanchez setting up a Danny Welbeck goal in the 57th minute.

Yet even as Anfield grew

increasingly nervous in a much more even affair, Wijnaldum ended the home fans' worries by converting an injury-time soother on the break. —Reuters



Arsenal's Laurent Koscielny in action with Liverpool's Roberto Firmino during the match of Premier League between Arsenal and Liverpool at Anfield on 4 February, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Djokovic has lost his edge, says former mentor Pilic

BELGRADE — Novak Djokovic has lost the tenacity which enabled him to rule men's tennis for a number of years, former mentor Niki Pilic said on Saturday.

"Djokovic reached the Mount Everest of tennis last year after winning the French Open," Pilic, who guided the Serb as a junior at his Munich academy, told Bosnian daily Nezavisne.

"He had 16,950 points and that's a tally which will never be repeated again, but loss of form and missing tournaments made his advantage melt away."

Djokovic looked untouchable after capturing his 12th grand slam title at Roland Garros last June, but was dethroned from the top of the world rankings last November by Andy

Murray, who beat him in the final of the season-ending ATP World Tour Finals.

The 29-year-old Serb appeared to have rediscovered some of his form when he gained revenge over the Briton in January's Qatar Open final but he then suffered a shock second-round Australian Open exit at the hands of Uzbek Denis Istomin. This week he was beaten by Australian Nick Kyrgios in the quarter-finals of an ATP event in Acapulco, prompting Pilic to cast doubts whether Djokovic can reclaim the top spot. "Novak had a physical and mental edge second to none, he was in sixth gear," said the 77-year-old Croatian who helped a Djokovic-led Serbia to their 2010 Davis Cup title in an advisory role.—Reuters